

“To Battle for Our Ideas”: Community Ethic and Anthracite Labor, 1920-1940

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By the beginning of September 1920, over 130,000 anthracite mine workers had left their jobs in peaceful but determined protest, “to take a vacation.” More than four of every five workers of the Tri-districts 1, 7, and 9 in northeastern and central Pennsylvania stayed home. They opposed not only the mine operators but the officers of their union, the United Mine Workers of America. Some 10,000 mine workers had already struck, wildcat fashion, six weeks earlier, so that by September 130 of 164 collieries were shut down. The mine workers refused to accept the findings of President Woodrow Wilson’s Anthracite Coal Commission, despite the word of their union that workers would comply. The majority report recommended a retroactive wage increase of seventeen per cent, but mine workers rejected that as significantly less than the twenty-seven per cent figure they believed the Commission had agreed to and then changed. They rejected a minimum rate less than in the bituminous contract; and they saw no provisions against subcontracting, the very issue that resulted in the earlier wildcat strike.¹

These points of contention of 1920—wages, parity with soft coal, subcontracting—remained alive throughout the 1920-40 period. Mine workers held insurgency or “rump” conventions in defiance of regular UMW conventions, went out on wildcat strikes, and endured strikes in excess of 160 days in 1922 and 1925 that when ended, had achieved little more than pre-strike wages and conditions. In 1933 an insurgent group in the Wyoming Region, District 1, attempted to establish its own union, the United Anthracite Miners of Pennsylvania (UAM).

Like other anthracite events of the 1920s and early 1930s, the rise of the UAM is part of a larger, worker concern—an ongoing conflict and debate about the meaning of justice. Workers valued their social experience every bit as much as their individuality, to the point that their sense of justice figured into a more inclusive or community ethic. From the very beginnings of effective UMW organization, economic and communal concerns coincided. In September 1897, 250 unarmed immigrant strikers marched on Lattimer; and the Luzerne County Sheriff, James Martin with eighty-seven deputies met them, killed nineteen, and wounded thirty-eight. The men became “martyrs” to the cause of anthracite unity, and Johnny Mitchell became their almost sainted leader.² With the union came dignity. A former mine worker, Lewis Casterline, recalled his earliest memories, 1908-1910, in this context:

I used to get up at five o'clock in the morning with my relations; my poor father would be going to work down at Fernwood Slopes; and I would go to school, and on the way I would see them. Whether they were Polacks, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Italians, or whatever, they'd always do like that [puts up two fingers] and I was always wondering why they were doing that. [So his father told him] "We couldn't talk Irish, we couldn't talk this or that, but when you saw them two fingers" [that meant] "Two cars a man, don't load no more than two cars a man." In 1902, John Mitchell organized the union; now those men don't have to cater to the boss too much. In other words, they'll cater to him out of respect, and obey; but now we got the schoolhouse where the meetings are set. See, we load two cars a man; you make a good day's wages. If a guy starts loading five or six and the other guy can't load five or six, now you got the competition. Man against man, miner against miner, laborer against laborer. But now, we got the schoolhouse, we go down there *to battle for our ideas*. Not only the grievances; when so and so got hurt in the mines, and the companies didn't pay for the doctor, they'd raise the collection. See, that was an honor that they had amongst them, and they didn't break it.³

This sense of honor also explains why most mine workers, according to Casterline, opposed the "selfish practice of subcontracting." In fact, the labor representative on the 1920 Anthracite Commission expressed total opposition to subcontracting. Although the national UMW could not resolve the issue, the workers elected District 1 officers who promised to fight it. They did so in 1922, 1925, 1927.⁴ The workers sorted out their positions at union meetings as well as at work and in their homes, organizations, and neighborhoods. What was said measured what was done: how much coal was loaded, under what conditions, by how many men, for what rate, with how much yardage and rock. The subtext was the unspoken fear of accident, a wife with youngsters and no husband to support them. Work had a symbolic, even a Christian meaning. Cars, examined for rock content, went to "the courthouse"; a hard place to mine, a "Catholic" place. Miners and their families abhorred the company attitude of regarding "mules more than the men." References to strikes were often military metaphors about "long battles," "wars," with strikers that "charge on police." It was common for mounted, helmeted state police, called "Cossacks," to club picketers and tear up their gardens. One still hears that John L. Lewis was or was not "any good" or that he was "all for the soft coal"; that a boss was "honest"; a union representative a "good man"; that the men refused to go along because they had "no say"; that "scabs" ruined it for everybody and should "not get away with it." That such concerns translated into union activity is not surprising in the light of the workers' ancestral origins.

In cultural terms, conditions in Europe and America during the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries seemed very different, a babel of languages and styles. But in the dreams of men and women and the reality of the workplace, conditions were much the same: hierarchical authority backed up by force, increasing mobility within and to countries, change to industrialization and urbanization with increasingly powerful technologies of industry, rail, and ship powered by coal. The decline of Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires meant that ethnocultural loyalties surfaced with renewed economic hopes among Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians. At the turn of the century, there were strikes and labor cooperatives in eastern and southern Europe. Just as some rural Americans were leaving mortgaged farms for industrial jobs expecting eventually to return to the land, perhaps one third of the emigrants left with hope of returning with funds to stabilize their families back home. If anything, the more recent immigrants had a strong communal consciousness because they had a more recent memory of village, regional, and in the cases of eastern Europe, a national sense of social identity. They were closer to their ancestral stories. Once determined to settle in the anthracite regions, workers and their wives established not only homes but neighborhoods, churches, schools, and innumerable voluntary organizations, a pattern integral with unionization.⁵

For the anthracite worker, then, community ethic consisted of a sense of *reciprocal obligations* between workers, between workers and employers, union officials, and extending to others, including religious leaders and, to a lesser extent, politicians; respect for the *good man or woman* who carried out obligations with honesty and courage, perhaps, more than mere duty or self-interest, such as the differences they saw between a Johnny Mitchell and a John L. Lewis; a *democratic expectation* that unfit or misguided officials could be removed, corrupt practices changed, and unsatisfactory conditions ameliorated; a general consensus about what a mining job, or a *good day's work* was all about; and a belief that *relational justice through solidarity* would prevail mainly through their own efforts but also from fair investigations of the mining industry or union by third parties like the state or federal government. Forces contributing to community ethic during this period included immigrant cultural backgrounds, second-generation loyalty to family and group, response to a virtual anthracite monopoly controlling jobs and most of the fuel market, and a *de facto* closed shop union. Such communal experience may shed some light on other views and aspects of labor activity including class, "skill degradation," environmental or workplace conditions, social reform, family wage stability.⁶ These will be considered in more detail after dealing with anthracite workers' concerns.

Any discussion of communal response, however, must take into account its corporate American context. Major railroad and coal companies dominated the region, retaining mineral rights to the land, keeping other industries out,

overexpanding to meet cyclical demand, encouraging an overabundance of labor—all with the aim of controlling the market for anthracite. By 1920 eight railroad coal companies controlled three-quarters of the production and nine-tenths of the anthracite reserves. However monopolistic, the coal industry experienced a sharp decline over the period: 1921: 90,358,642 tons, 162,926 workers; 1924: 87,277,449, 162,503; 1927: 79,367,154, 167,648; 1929: 72,986,844, 153,422; 1931: 59,115,387, 138,400. In the 1930s production leveled off to 50-55,000,000 tons and employment to just under 100,000 workers.⁷

Coal companies continued to dominate the region and the industry by all but controlling the union and contracts as it suited their interests. This procedural form of justice—in contrast to the relational sense of justice held by workers—can be illustrated by the activities of two influential coal executives. Samuel D. (1867-1942) and his half-brother, Jesse B. Warriner (1883-1956) were the sons of Edward A. Warriner (1829-1908), an Episcopalian minister of St. Paul's Church, Montrose, Pennsylvania, and author of a theological novel, poetry, and a tract on Christian sociology. Samuel, who often served as chairman of negotiations with the UMW, was president of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company (1912-37) and later chairman of the board. Jesse succeeded him to presidency of the company and then as chairman of the board. To the Warriners, union demands could serve only to raise costs at a time of deflation and decline in demand. Speak-

Courtesy of Pennsylvania Historical and Anthracite Museum Complex.



Photo of mine worker drilling at "low coal" (1925).



Photo of mine worker drilling at the face in "high coal" (1925).

ing as Chairman of the Operations Negotiating Committee during the 1922 Strike, S. D. Warriner appealed to "the economic situation [which] not only forbids any increase in costs and prices, but compels a reduction." In 1925 he rejected Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot's plan of maintaining prices and profit sharing as "impracticable," and with mine workers receiving more than other workers, investors of the Morgan caliber would go elsewhere—a prospect that spelled "calamity" for the industry. For these reasons, Warriner and the operators wanted "a finish fight" to break the union as they made clear in the industry journal, *Coal Age*.⁸

Labor contracts, the Warriners believed, restricted corporate freedom. According to Jesse Warriner, the right to corporate freedom derived directly from the Constitution. He quoted and italicized portions of Amendment V, "No *person* shall . . . be deprived of life, liberty, or *property* without due process of law." The "person" of the corporation, he believed, can carry on year to year and from generation to generation regardless of death and changes.⁹ The procedural model of justice ran according to the person's, or corporation's, freedom to act restrained only by due process. Otherwise, conditions of the market, technological change, labor costs, and the all-important financial support, determined the corporation's fate. Until the 1920s, anthracite's strong market position fit the corporate model it had designed. Meanwhile, John L. Lewis had had little success organizing the bitumi-

nous fields, so by 1925 he had to keep faith with his one army of strength, the anthracite workers.

Paradoxically, union and operator logic gradually merged over the period. Each side was threatened, one with competition from other fuels, the other from declining membership. The ruinous strike of 1925 that accelerated the public's turn to alternate fuels was settled without worker participation by Lewis and Richard F. Grant, the President of Lehigh Coal, upon terms already in place. In the language of the agreement, "work shall be resumed at once under the terms of the expired contract which, subject to modification hereinafter provided [a Board of Conciliation] shall be in force and effect until August 31, 1930."¹⁰ The 1930 contract continued the same terms for six more years, except for two important points: the partial checkoff and the reduction of the power of the locals. These two changes would worsen an already deteriorating situation. In Lewis's view the contract would "eliminate . . . strikes and shut-downs in violation of this agreement; eliminate group action designed to restrict output; restrict general mine committees to their constitutional functions within the union; recognizing that such committees have no power under this agreement."¹¹ Disarmed and disenfranchised, the mine workers would attempt to regain their lost power, culminating in the rise and fall of the UAM.

Faced with economic depression in the late 1920s and 1930s and reduced demand for coal, operators closed down collieries deemed inefficient or unnecessary. In District 9, forty-one locals of the Pennsylvania Coal and Iron Company demanded equalization of work time for their membership. In District 7 Michael Hartnedy knew that the 1930 contract tied the hands of locals to go out on strikes about equalization or any other issue. Conditions in District 1 had likewise deteriorated, igniting Wyoming-Lackawanna union activism. With large followings in Scranton, Pittston, Wilkes-Barre, and Nanticoke, union leaders worked out conflicts in insurgency actions, but after 1930 local power had been legally shut off. In January 1931 the Glen Alden Company, which accounted for almost one-fifth of total anthracite production, closed nine of its collieries resulting in massive unemployment. W. W. Inglis, Company president, called upon his friend, John L. Lewis, to order back to work the men who went out on wildcat strikes beginning in the fall of 1930 and again in March 1931. Lewis sent his officers, Thomas Kennedy and Phillip Murray, but to many mine workers these men, John Boylan, President of District 1, and their boss John L. Lewis were no longer worthy of respect. It was time for new leadership.¹²

Thomas Maloney, chairman of the Glen Alden Grievance Committee, found himself in a dilemma. He had opposed the terms of the 1930 contract at the Tri-district convention, and a year later his convictions were reinforced. Not only did his grievance committee call for equalization and colliery reopening, it demanded

the end of wage reductions in violation of the contract. Without Boylan's or Lewis's approval, Maloney and his committee believed they had no choice but to strike. Maloney and his ally, Rinaldo Cappellini, sought to remove Boylan by convening a rump convention, and at the same time threatening to form a new union. A delegate to Maloney's rump convention and then for the UAM, Chester Brozena, explained why he believed men joined the new union: "You start going to union meetings, and wondering what the district was going to do for members that needed help, and then they come back and told you, 'Nothing.' We were assessed three dollars a month . . . to help soft coal . . . and when we tried to get some help from soft coal, we were turned down by John L. Lewis," so "that was the purpose of Anthracite Miners, to break away from John L. Lewis and his United Mine Workers because he was strictly soft coal." Brozena also agreed, in effect, with Monsignor John J. Curran (an advisor to the UAM) about the checkoff. It was the "worst evil that happened around the mines" because when they collected your dues at the mine entrance, the official had to "care what they done for you or what they didn't do."¹³ Aware of the greater market potential of soft coal, Lewis put equalization and unemployment into a context of a high wage standard.¹⁴

Courtesy of Pennsylvania Historical and Anthracite Museum Complex.



Photo showing mine workers' housing on the left, breaker waste bank in the center and coal breaker on the far right (1923).

Companies used the courts to enjoin Maloney and his vice president, Henry Schuster, from continuing the strikes. The accused held that without a vote of the men for or against the UAM, no one was culpable. Violence mounted in District 1 as UAM pickets confronted UMW workers backed by local and state police while strikes persisted throughout early 1934. Public-spirited individuals like Curran called for peace based upon investigations by the federal government. Together with strike leaders, he traveled to Washington several times to enlist help from New York Senator Robert Wagner, the NLRB, and aides to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Finally with the promise of an impartial investigation, Curran persuaded UAM members to cease their resistance.

Hope came in the form of Clause 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act which stated that workers had a right "to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." Wagner designated NLB umpire, James Gorman, to investigate grievances and decide the final outcome of anthracite unrest. Although John L. Lewis, the administration's man of labor for the nation, was his personal friend, Gorman assured Maloney of a fair hearing. Gorman heard hundreds of grievances, but he did not find enough evidence that the 1930 contract had been violated. As for Section 7a, he ruled that operators were bound by federal and state constitutional provisions to abide by the terms of the existing contract with the UMW, and he also gave the press his views about the need to help "the surplus mine worker" to get a better job. That this view proscribed the will of thousands—from 5,000 (Gorman's figure) to 35,000 (Monroe) to 50,000 (Casterline)—was to Gorman not at issue.¹⁵

UAM leadership then attempted to have the miners vote for a union of their choice. In early 1935, they had support from Pennsylvania's Governor George Earle and Attorney General, Charles Margiotti, but Lewis and Inglis threatened legal action. No vote was taken. UAM mine workers struggled to make their sense of justice legal. They fought the Lewis UMW for democracy, and then paradoxically they fought each other for unity. After the 1930 contract forbidding local strikes, miners passed motions from the floor to protect local officers from suspension. Workers and their families took to the picket lines in support of Maloney's call for an all-out strike against the Glen Alden in February, 1935. Thousands of women joined the women's auxiliary of the UAM. Women had taken an active role in union demonstrations since the 1902 Strike when they confronted the Coal and Iron Police and later on defied state police. Among ninety-one UAM defendants held for violating court injunctions in 1935, twelve were women. Groups of women attacked men crossing picket lines in Plymouth, Wanamie, and the Hanover section of Nanticoke. Three hundred students in Hanover protested against teachers and a janitor whose relatives worked for the Glen Alden. High school students in Wilkes-Barre demanded that two of their classmates arrested for stoning UMW loyalists'

homes be released from the Luzerne County jail. Emerson Jennings, a printer, gathered over 5,000 miners' signatures protesting a judge's order consigning UAM leaders to prison.¹⁶

By May 1935, both sides were working on a compromise. Lewis met with the Nanticoke Business Professional Men's Association Committee headed by Rev. Victor Simkonis, presumably agreeing to remove Boylan; in fact, after resigning, he was named Secretary to the Board of Conciliation. Inglis agreed to hire former UAM members on an "as needed" basis. To Maloney, "It was a tough fight, with all the elements against us, but I am satisfied that all the men will be returned to their former positions. If the provisions of the proposal are carried out, the mine workers can say that their fight was not in vain."¹⁷ After the UAM's end Gorman wrote, "Dear John, The obsequies were not painful and the corpse was decently interred It has now sunk into the vile depths from which it sprung, unwept, unhonored, and unsung." Lewis responded to Gorman, "My Dear Judge, You, alone, are entitled to the credit for its satisfactory disposition. The members of the United Mine Workers of America are the beneficiaries of this fine exercise of your great personal influence."¹⁸

The contract negotiations of 1936 included long-term labor issues. Lewis finally acknowledged that companies had some responsibility to equalize available work. Operators agreed that twenty per cent of work could be equalized unless local arrangements differed, but stipulated that equalization had nothing to do with keeping open or closing any colliery. Agreement on a seven-hour, five-day work week for most of the year meant a de facto wage increase and a further equalization of work. Although not eliminated, subcontracts had to conform with terms of the general contract. Operators accepted the automatic checkoff, and also gained union responsibility for suppressing local strikes and punishing perpetrators. S. D. Warriner also wanted to link union cooperation for the reduction of bootleg mining with equalization but without wage increases.¹⁹ Yet the practice of bootlegging continued, subcontracting increased, and payrolls continued to fall (by some fifty per cent between 1926 and 1937). The 1936 contract neither vindicated labor's longterm concerns nor changed operator or UMW positions. The automatic checkoff reduced the likelihood of dual unionism. During UMW-operator negotiations, memory of the UAM recurred violently. On Good Friday, 1936, Thomas Maloney and his four-year-old son were injured fatally by a postal bomb.²⁰

That tragic event brought this period of anthracite labor militancy to a close. UAM insurgents had fought for regional control, but were not much interested in social reform aimed, for instance, at public ownership or regulation of the coal industry. UMW leadership under Lewis did call in the early 1920s for nationalization of the mines, but that had more to do with union politics than social reform.²¹ Furthermore, coal companies successfully resisted state and federal

attempts at regulation. Whether from the viewpoint of labor or of the industry, unionization and social reform were not synonymous during the period. David Montgomery defines labor's response, or lack thereof, by 1925: "Just as the outcome of postwar labor struggles had persuaded most older immigrants to abandon whatever dreams they might ever have harbored of together reforming society, so the quota laws made any possible return home an irrevocable act."²² Alfred Chandler concluded in his study of American corporations that "union members almost never asked to participate in decisions concerning output, pricing, scheduling, and resource allocation."²³ Anthracite labor militancy aimed neither at social reform nor only at improvement of working conditions and wages. The UAM in District 1 and insurgents in other districts did attempt to influence corporate scheduling and resource allocation by fighting for equalization and against subcontracting. Anthracite labor activity was more communal than radical or conservative.

If the anthracite experience is at all indicative, labor militancy had a communal center, pushed and pulled according to environmental circumstances of the market, the specific union and industry, integration of immigrant labor. The workers' sense of community, reinforced by militantly anti-labor companies, 1) describes their particular methods of insurgency (rump conventions, equalization, etc.); 2) corresponds to their European and American labor experiences; 3) squares with similar institutional behavior such as forming ethnic neighborhoods, churches, associations, schools, etc.; 4) accounts for the symbiosis within their families, among their cultural groups, and by extension, between coal and other industries. One cannot isolate workers' labor experience from other parts of their lives.

In the United States and abroad, however, organized labor activity was a fact of life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even though at least one-third of Slavonic, Polish, and Italian immigrant workers returned to their homelands, the UMW took root in the anthracite region by the late 1890s—within less than a generation of the new immigration. Had those settlers and migrants acted primarily out of their own ethnic or family interests, they would not have unionized so readily. Moreover, a distinct minority—notably the subcontractors—had entrepreneurial aims. Of course, mining labor jobs did provide quick money for setting up shops, taverns and other small enterprises. Based on their activities once here, first-generation settlers and migrants must have come with a variety of skills and vocational expectations already in place. Emigrants may have had more diverse skills than American immigration records show, when compared to those of other host countries. They represented a variety of occupations, as, for example, artisans, agriculturalists, small producers, and craftsmen. Their geographical and occupational mobility began prior to migration; for example, attendance of night

schools and trade schools founded by artisan societies; growing rates of inter-marriages between spouses from different villages; emigration to other villages, cities, and countries.²⁴

In response to industrial and agricultural changes, the rise of labor unions in Europe paralleled that of the United States. In the Tisza Plain, the Transdanubian Hills, and the Hungarian heartland between the Danube and the Tisza, landless cultivators worked for operators owning at least forty hectares. Proprietors enforcing labor contracts faced agricultural unions in the 1890s that staged strikes throughout the Tisza Plain, a movement which spread to other areas of immigrant ancestry. In Italy, conditions of land ownership, a cash economy, and occupational type varied from region to region—the North, Central, Deep South, and Sicily. Those in the Center engaged in strong labor protest, setting up separate governmental units, leasing and operating estates as well as co-operatives to bypass the private market for food and other staples. Much like the early formation of workingmen's associations in the United States, Italian mutual aid societies resembled artisan and laborer organizations with many functions including aid to families of an injured wage earner and also resistance to proprietors. An Italian report in 1893 referred to industrial and agricultural "Leagues of Resistance" throughout the country, notably the "bloody events of Conselice Caltavuturo, Serra di Falco, the strikes of Polesine and Romagna . . . Perhaps the most jolting . . . realization [to Italian Catholic minds in 1892] was that the supposed religiosity and conservatism of rural society and its resistance to innovations, social conflict, and socialism was illusory."²⁵

Of particular interest for northeastern Pennsylvanians are several Sicilian mining towns, including the Serra di Falco and San Cataldo, points of immigrant origin in the Pittston area. Miners made up fifty-six per cent of male emigrants for 1910-1914, skilled artisans twelve per cent, and town and day laborers thirty-two per cent. By contrast to Sardinian or American mines, "the Sicilian sulfur mining operations remained small and were largely dependent upon human labor" since the miners wanted to retain "the system of petty entrepreneurship under which each miner hired his own labor force and provided a portion of his own capital . . ."²⁶ This practice, of course, prefigured subcontracting in the anthracite region. As it turned out, many immigrants faced a familiar mining situation in America. In both cases strikes were illegal or ineffective until just after 1900; absentee owners of mines and of land had middlemen manage their enterprises; armed units kept order, the *campieri* in Sicily, and Coal and Iron police and state police in northeastern Pennsylvania; wage and price agreements for sulfur and coal were maintained by operators and by contract with worker organizations.²⁷

Distinctive anthracite circumstances led to questions about a community ethic in other industries. Bituminous miners, for example, were less united under

the UMW banner, worked at operations spread out over several states, and faced more successful owner opposition to the union. Still, some bituminous workers sought such communal needs as pure water, a small hospital, and protection from eviction.²⁸ Anthracite miners expected their help, but the bituminous workers had troubles of their own. Workers looked to the I. W. W. and set up, for example, the Progressive Mine Workers of America in Illinois in 1932. The latter survived, while the UAM did not, possibly because of a more recalcitrant leadership and refusal to submit to New Deal intervention. That the PMW had formed a woman's auxiliary seemed to one Lewis investigator a strong explanation of its success.²⁹

Courtesy of Pennsylvania Historical and Anthracite Museum.



Photo of a row of improved mine workers' tenement houses in Olyphant, Pa., (1920).

Miners and steel workers had contemporaneous cultural origins and employment experience, but of course the latter did not form an effective union until some forty years later. Steel workers belonged to many craft unions which never quite unified under their umbrella, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. They usually kept immigrants out for several reasons: the perception of foreigners as cheap, strike-breaking labor, the skilled steel workers' refusal to coalesce with the unskilled, and relatively spread-out workings of the steel industry. By contrast, immigrants were encouraged in the 1890s to join the UMW and even led the effort in some areas; skill variations were not so wide in mining which meant that the "skill degradation" analysis is less explanatory; and, of course the UMW, unlike steel, included virtually all mine workers and became, in effect, a closed shop. Steel companies were, if anything, more ruthless in getting rid of labor agitators. Yet, steelworkers did strike. Both immigrants and later generations went out on wildcat strikes separately as well as together, especially under the unified CIO banner after 1935. David Brody's analysis of earlier steelworkers reaction is ambiguous; for example, he says, "the mass of peasant workmen were, as they appeared, unpromising union material." But a few pages later, he concludes that they "were effective strikers because they were peasants" to whom "communal approval" mattered very much.³⁰ That is precisely the point; the "proper referent is not the individual at all. It is, rather, the community."³¹ This general observation about migrant labor bears out Caroline Golab's findings about a "symbiotic relationship" between male and female earnings to keep the family together, and make it possible for ethnic communities to take root throughout northeastern Pennsylvania: with "extreme fluctuations" in anthracite employment, "low wages, horrid working conditions, and high accident potential, it is remarkable that any communities were able to form at all."³²

Yet a symbiotic relationship existed not only within the family but by extension between worker and union and between mining and other industries. Women, especially miners' daughters, worked in lace, cigar, and silk manufacturing plants; in fact, silk production was greater in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties than in any other area of the country. Family and community were integrated on economic grounds. A silk company manager pointed out in 1925, at the height of the longest anthracite strike, "when men of the mines are on strike, more of the girls work." A coal miner said, "If the silk mills were not operating the strike would not last."³³ Labor acquiescence in one industry made labor militancy possible in another.

Families relied on support from a variety of sources. They depended upon relatives and neighbors, and they established an amazing number and variety of fraternal, food cooperative, mortgage, insurance, and by the late 1920s even pan-ethnic organizations. Poles, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Italians just as the Welsh, Germans, and

English had established their own parishes, in effect, by building the church and acquiring pastors. Some congregations wanted to retain church deeds, much to the dismay of the Scranton bishops, who had to deal with more ethnic than regional parishes. Yet the diocesan churches benefitted from loans from credit unions, breaking the "monopolies once enjoyed by the area's banks."³⁴

Given such extensive communal activity, it makes little sense to compartmentalize labor activity. Ethnic particularism, while certainly present, was not a bar to cooperation evidenced not only by the union or church but, as the miners themselves point out, the shopkeeper: "In this anthracite region we had good storekeepers, good butchers . . . because when there were strikes, hardships in the family, they always seemed to take care of us; they would carry us for hundreds and hundreds of dollars . . . people with big hearts that trusted people." Workers remember charging their purchases "on the book." Grocers of varying backgrounds extended credit. "If it wasn't for Jewish storekeepers," a miner said, "a lot of people would have gone hungry in the winters. . . ."³⁵

Regardless of communal support, workers had to face the absolute power of the boss. Choosing the union meant hurting the family. To make a decent wage, miners needed to have good conditions, which were determined by the foreman. Stories abound about miners "blackballed" by the companies. During the UAM period, it was even worse, "If you support Maloney you would lose your job. The companies supported the union; they cooperated. If they were against you, they'd push you out; that's all. If you speak too much, they put a stick and powder on your porch." One Glen Alden foreman, William Everett, did not have to go that far during the UAM period. He transferred one "radical," as he called him, to a Scranton colliery; assigned to another an incompetent laborer; had the company doctor attend another miner's injured daughter. Everett even controlled the union local by having one official remove another. "You had to know how to handle people," Everett said. "You had to manipulate them." Moreover, Glen Alden's policy was to evict UAM participants from company homes, a practice Inglis justified since tenants acted in "violation of the UMW contract."³⁶

It is all the more remarkable then that mine workers acted against their own and their family self-interest; or put another way, that they unionized and fought to preserve individual dignity and family stability. They tried to have company and union act, in their view, responsibly. "We went out on strike," a miner said, "for this, on strike for that, which we did not want to do but which we had to do. No federal government to come in and say what [the companies were] doing was illegal." He credited legislators like Congressman Daniel J. Flood for assuring compensation for mine related deaths and black lung benefits.³⁷

In sum, miners battled for their ideas of democratic community based upon an order of reciprocal obligations and relational justice. Such solidarity was proba-

bly their main strength. That may have been why Lewis Casterline's father and the other miners put up two fingers, their agreed-upon output, and why the men gathered in the schoolhouse after work. That was why mine workers and their families held out during the long strikes of 1922 and 1925, and why they fought for and against the UMW in the 1930s.

Notes

1. *New York Times*, 2 Sept. 1920; *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 2 Sept. 1920; Hilmar Raushenbush, *The Anthracite Question* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1924), 43-45. Insurgent executive committee included Enoch Williams, Rinaldo Cappellini, Martin McDonough, Garfield Lewis, Peter Drobish—Americans of Welsh, Irish, Italian, and Slavonic descent typically occupying local leadership positions during the period. Immigrants and their sons constituted the majority of mine workers, mainly Poles, Slovaks, "Magyars," Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Italians.
2. Michael Novak, *The Guns of Lattimer: The True Story of a Massacre and a Trial August 1897-March 1898* (New York: Basic Books 1978); Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968). George A. Turner, "The Lattimer Massacre and Its Sources," *Slovakia*, 27 (1977): 9-43.
3. Lewis Casterline, interview with author, Wyoming, Pa., 2 Aug. 1990. Born in 1903, Casterline participated in many of the events chronicled in this essay.
4. *United Mine Workers Journal*, 15 Sept. 1920. "Bringing a story of alleged wholesale graft and payroll padding in the coal mines in the vicinity of Pittston, Pa., a committee representing the United Mine Workers has arrived in New York to lay the facts before the directors and stockholders of the Pennsylvania Coal Company, of No. 165 Broadway." *New York Evening Telegraph*, 3 Aug. 1920. Cappellini, who chaired this committee, was elected president of District 1 in the 1920s on the strength of his opposition to subcontracting.
5. Donald K. Monroe, "A Decade of Turmoil: John L. Lewis and the Anthracite Miners 1926-1935" (Ph.D. diss. Georgetown University, 1977). I am indebted to Monroe's thorough and illuminating study. Also relevant are: John Bodnar, *Anthracite People: Families, Unions, and Work* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1983); Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Clement Valletta, "Ritual and Folklore in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Region: Old to New World Wonder," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, 33 (Autumn 1983): 2-30.
6. The many different interpretations of labor militancy may reflect its complexity. Herbert Gutman documented a distinctive working-class subculture that was quite different from views of workers as "remnant" or plebeian" obstacles to elitist political initiatives, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). See also David Montgomery, "Gutman's Nineteenth-Century America," *Labor History*, 19 (Summer 1978): 417. Montgomery extends and critiques Gutman's language of modernization to account for social reform by workers until the 1920s, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). In *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 158, Montgomery considers the hegemony of capitalist ownership

and the "coersive authority of government" inserted into American work relation. Controlling procedural or legalistic forms of justice enabled corporations (union and government) to control workers' including anthracite miners' sometimes opposing sense of reciprocal obligations and relational justice (which also differs from distributive justice whereby individuals are theoretically to have equal opportunities and/or rewards). See John Raines, "Toward a Relational Theory of Justice," *Cross Currents*, 39 (Summer 1989): 129-41. John Bodnar critiques Montgomery's workplace and skill degradation analysis in favor of family wage stability as a primary cause of labor militancy, in *Workers' World: Kinship, Community, and Protest in an Industrial Society, 1900-1950* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982); See also, Harold Benenson, "The Community and Family Bases of U. S. Working Class Protest, 1880-1920: A Critique of the 'Skill Degradation' and 'Ecological' Perspectives," in Louis Kreisberg, ed., *Social Movements*, 8 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985): 109-32; Ron Rothbart, "Homes Are What Any Strike Is About': Immigrant Labor and the Family Wage," *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1989): 267-84. Rothbart, like Bodnar, attributes labor protest to immigrant family wage issues, "a movement for distributive justice."

7. Edward E. Hunt, F. G. Tryon, and Joseph H. Willits, *What the Coal Commission Found* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1925), ch. xiv. Eliot Jones, *The Anthracite Coal Combination in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 112-92. Despite provisions of the Hepburn Act disallowing railroad ownership of coal mines, the practice continued through a pattern of interlocking directorates. According to N. Benjamin Powell, the scholarly literature has exaggerated the amount of coal land owned by the Reading and other major companies. In 1917, four railroads—Reading, D & H, D L & W, and Lehigh Valley—accounted for nearly fifty per cent of the total production, and eleven companies each produced over one million tons. Some 700 mines were in operation, and one-third were located in Luzerne County. "The Pennsylvania Anthracite Industry, 1769-1976." *Pennsylvania History*, 46 (Jan. 1980): 14-15. Commonwealth of

Pennsylvania, Anthracite Coal Industry Commission: *Ad Interim Report*, 1937, 4-5; *Report of the Anthracite Coal Industry Commission*, 1938, 357-60. Monroe, "Decade of Turmoil," 379.

8. S. D. Warriner, quoted in *Anthracite Strike of 1922* (Philadelphia: Anthracite Bureau of Information, 1923), 8, 13-14. He went on to contrast fatalities per million tons mined 1916-20 and wage differentials between anthracite and railroad workers in *Anthracite Strike of 1925* (Philadelphia: Anthracite Bureau of Information, 1926), 50-54. "Hard-coal Operators Prepared for Finish Fight in War Against Future Strikes," *Coal Age*, 26 November 1925, 737.

9. J. B. Warriner, *My Years in Anthracite* (Lansford, Pa., n. p., 1951), 54-55; Samuel Warriner, "What the Miners' Union Demands," *New York Times*, 5 Aug. 1923, argued that the automatic check-off violated the Sherman Anti-Trust law.

10. *Anthracite Strike of 1925*, 47; Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), 138-43. Jesse Warriner concludes, "the long strikes of 1922 and 1925, for which neither operators nor miners can wholly escape blame, hastened the end, but it was already well on its way." *My Years in Anthracite*, 85; Monroe, "Decade of Turmoil," 36-49; Harold Kanarek, "Disaster for Hard Coal: The Anthracite Strike of 1925-1926," *Labor History*, 15 (Winter 1974): 44-63; Robert Zieger, "Pennsylvania Coal and Politics: The Anthracite Strike of 1925-1926," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 93 (April 1969): 244-62.

11. *New York Times*, 16 July 1930. Italics added.

12. Monroe, "Decade of Turmoil," 98-190.

13. Curran's comments on the checkoff, *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 3 Jan. 1934. Curran, who was pastor of St. Mary's Church, Wilkes-Barre, developed a friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt during the 1902 Strike. Brozena quoted in Bodnar, *Anthracite People*, 50-51. Charles Rovinski, interview with author, Plains, Pa., 10 Aug. 1990, revealed that workers who opposed the UAM considered its lack of legal standing and funds.

14. Dubovsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 136-38. Unionizing and a high wage standard would force inefficient mining operations out of business and maintain employment, a view Lewis held by 1923:

"Shut down 4000 coal mines force 200,000 miners into other industries and the coal problem will settle itself"—words attributed to Lewis by Joseph Finley, *The Corrupt Kingdom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 61. However, coal company ownership of land and influence on local politicians reduced opportunities for alternative employers to open up in the anthracite region. See Vincent Znaniecki in Bodnar, *Anthracite People*, 97-98.

15. *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 13 Oct. 1934; Monroe, "Decade of Turmoil," 292-94; Casterline interview; Tom Tippet, "The Miners Fight Their Leaders," *American Mercury*, 32 (June 1934): 129-37. Tippet poses the issue of miners' rights to self-determination under Section 7a, and its proscription by Lewis' procedural use of "county, state, civil and military authorities."

16. *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 18 March 1935, 26 March 1935; John Bodnar, "The Family Economy and Labor Protest in Industrial America: Hard Coal Miners in the 1930s," in David Salay, ed., *Hard Coal, Hard Times: Ethnicity and Labor in the Anthracite Region* (Scranton: Anthracite Museum Press, 1984), 83-85; Steve Nelson, James Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 170.

17. *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 7 June 1935.

18. Lewis and Gorman, 30 Oct. 1935, quoted in Monroe, "Decade of Turmoil," 324-325, ch. viii.

19. *Anthracite Coal Industry Interim Report, Bootleg Coal*, 1937. Some five per cent of total production was bootlegged, and the practice could ruin existing or potential mine workings. The issue also dramatized a difference between communal and corporate viewpoints. According to the commission report, an "increasing number" of "clergy, court, juries" condoned a practice that enabled miners to make a living wage that operators did not provide. Miners thus had a "moral right to exploit these riches for themselves." Miners "will tell you that the coal does not belong to any group of persons or corporations but the people at large and therefore may be seized by self-help." Steve Nelson discusses the "inherent contradictions" of the Bootleg Miners Union and the unavailability of capital from company-controlled banks and equip-

ment firms, Steve Nelson, 165.

20. Although convicted of the murders, a Michael Fugman (who served on the UAM board) is still thought innocent by some. Miller and Sharpless, *Kingdom of Coal*, 311; Nelson, *Steve Nelson*, 171-72.

21. Dubovsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 70-74.

22. Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 462.

23. Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 494.

24. For European background see, for example: John W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 9-38; Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 27-46. Supposed regional differences (northern Italian with radical labor backgrounds vis-a-vis southern peasant "self-reliance") did not affect immigrant union activity in Edwin Fenton, "Italians in the Labor Movement," *Pennsylvania History*, 26 (April 1959): 133-48; significance ascribed to "skills" should have to do with cultural attitudes and habits of work, Thomas Sowell, *Race and Economics* (New York: McKay, 1975). Both eastern and southern European immigrants generally learned their mining trade in Pennsylvania except for those who first worked in German and Scottish mines before finally migrating. According to oral accounts, experienced immigrant workers appreciated the concern for "stricter" safety in Europe. Migrational and occupational data can be gleaned from naturalization records, 1912-26 Luzerne Co. Prothonotary Offices: three of four Eastern Europeans left for America from Germany (Hamburg or Bremen) and Antwerp, Belgium; the remainder from Liverpool, England; Rotterdam, Holland; Glasgow or Greenock, Scotland (and fewer from Riga, Russia; Leuna, Hungary; etc.). Italians left mainly from Naples, Palermo, Genoa, and Le Havre, France. Applicants for naturalization listed miner and then laborer (probably miners' helpers) as their occupation; others (fifteen per cent) listed carpenter, car repairer, machinist, blacksmith, barber, merchant, clerk, butcher, liquor dealer, agent, etc. Applicants were usually sponsored by grocers,

undertakers, or tavern owners, and sometimes agents or bankers all mostly of the same ethnic background.

25. Humbert Gualtieri, *The Labor Movement in Italy* (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1946), 211; Sandor Agocs, *The Troubled Origins of the Italian Catholic Labor Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 69. See also: Barton, *Peasants and Strangers*, 37; John MacDonald, "Some Socio-Economic Emigration Differences in Rural Italy, 1902-1913," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 7 (1952): 55-72; "Agricultural Organization, Migration, and Labour Militancy in Rural Italy," *Economics History Review*, 16 (1963): 61-75.

26. Briggs, *An Italian Passage*, 8-11.

27. Ralph Gommer, "Causes for the Decline in Anthracite Mining in Northeastern Pennsylvania in the Twentieth Century," (M.A. Thesis, American University, 1955), 157-58; Adolf Cardoni, interview with author Plains, Pa., 18 Sept. 1990. One of the most powerful subcontractors, Santo Volpe, was from Montedoro, Sicily; and one of his most dedicated opponents, Rinaldo Cappellini was from Umbria in central Italy, a region of even more organized labor militancy than existed in Sicily. During the 1920s and 1930s, contractors like Volpe, Paul Sindaco, and Anthony Adonizio fought UMW and UAW leaders like Cappellini, Enoch Williams, Alex Campbell, and Thomas Maloney. As the industry declined and militancy abated, subcontractors gained more power, so much so that many became independent coal operators in the 1930s and thereafter. By 1952 some 376 independents produced fifty-four per cent of the coal as compared with sixty independents producing twenty-one percent in 1919. First, second, and later generation members (of many backgrounds including Welsh, Irish, Slovak, Polish, etc.) took advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities despite their lack of educational and financial resources. Workers did have someone in charge to confront "man to man" as one miner said of the later (1940-1950) period.

28. Irwin Marcus, Eileen Cooper, and Beth O'Leary, "The Coal Strike of 1919 in Indiana County," *Pennsylvania History*, 56 (July 1989): 180.

29. Tippet, "The Miners Fight Their Leaders," 132;

Dubovsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 169-70, 200-201. Lewis had a then middle class concept of womanhood (idealized object of her husband's position), quite different from the workers' wives (especially those of eastern European background) establishing credit unions, supporting church organizations, even taking part in picketing.

30. David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), 136-40; John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

31. Michael Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 66.

32. Caroline Golab, "The Impact of Industrial Experience on the Immigrant Family: The Huddled Masses Reconsidered," in Richard Ehrlich, ed., *Immigrants in Industrial America 1850-1920* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 26.

33. *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 8 Nov. 1925.

34. John Gallagher, *A Century of History: The Diocese of Scranton 1868-1968* (Scranton: Diocese of Scranton, 1968), 333; Valletta, "Ritual and Folklore in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Region," 24-27; Luzerne Co. Court of Common Pleas Records, 1870-1930. There was quite a diverse ethnic religiosity: Russian Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Ukrainian Uniates, Polish National Catholics, Italian Protestants, Slovak Lutherans, etc.

35. Joseph Montouri, interview with John Ciotola, Hazelton, PA, 28 April 1973. Charles Rovinski interview.

36. Bodnar, "The Family Economy," 84-85; John Sarnoski, William Everett in *Anthracite People*, 62, 80-83.

37. Montouri worked in Hazelton and Wilkes-Barre area mines, 1928-1954 when after three heart attacks and his lungs "filled up" with coal dust, he had to quit. He remembered his uncle, who "used to stand on top of the big rock at the Luzerne and Schuylkill County line, called it Coxe's rock, and he said, 'In 1831, Tench Coxe come over here and said, 'All that I can see belongs to me

and all I can't see belongs to my brother.' " And that's the truth, right in this region here, fifty-six millionaires come out of that estate. How many men was killed, how many mothers was left, how many children was left?" An increasing bureaucratization of corporate activity reduced work not only to its contractual cost, as the Warriners put it, but during the New Deal to its social costs in health, accident, unemployment compensation. By the late 1930s, however, the battle for ideas had changed direction. With the further decline of the industry, rise of the independents, end of the UAW, and with immigration restrictions in place, mine workers who remained in the region looked more to their immediate

interest. Mine safety and ventilation, always in need of improvement, deteriorated along with the industry. According to oral reports, union and company officials sometimes accommodated each other, and there was evidence of union officials holding financial interests in companies after the Knox Disaster. See Miller and Sharpless, *Kingdom of Coal*, 321-23. The company mined just inches beneath the Susquehanna River, north of Wilkes-Barre. In January 1959, the river cascaded into virtually all of the Wyoming workings. Twelve miners were entombed, the era of deep anthracite mining ended, and thousands of mine workers became unemployed, many already suffering from black lung disease.